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ABSTRACT

This study describes a workshop course for high school students interested in writing articles, biographies, and humorous essays. Emphasis is on form and content, with special attention to the development of individual styles. Course objectives for the student include: (1) imitating various sentence structures, paragraph constructions, and unique styles, (2) writing biographical and autobiographical anecdotes, sketches, and longer prose pieces, (3) writing biographical articles about real and created people or inanimate objects, (4) writing informal articles examining and thoughtfully responding to sensory perceptions, (5) formulating thoughts, emotions, and reactions into short articles, (6) composing humorous responses to various media stimuli in the form of articles, drama, films, collages, or essays, and (7) creating humorous cartoons, comic strips, or essays. Various teaching strategies, including discussion questions, media presentations, readings, field trips, and publication of a literary magazine are included. A bibliography of student-teacher resources is also provided. (Author/DI)

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AUTHORIZED COURSE OF INSTRUCTION FOR THE QUINMESTER PROGRAM

DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

ENGLISH
Creative Writing: Informal Prose
5111.38
5112.51
5113.106
5114.178
5115.193
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5167.04

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English

Written by Marlene Knowles
for the
DIVISION OF INSTRUCTION
Dade County Public Schools
Miami, Florida
1971

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COURSE TITLE: CREATIVE WRITING: INFORMAL PROSE

COURSE DESCRIPTION: A writing workshop for students interested in writing articles, biographies, and humorous essays. Emphasis is on form and content with particular encouragement of individual styles. Selections written in this class will be considered for the school literary magazine.

I. PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

A. Given collections of writers' sentence varieties, paragraph constructions, and unique styles, the student will model his writing from these patterns for practice to expand his structural and stylistic capabilities.

B. Given biographical articles, chapters, and books to read and evaluate for form, content, and style, the student will write biographical and autobiographical anecdotes, sketches, and longer prose pieces.

C. The student will write biographical articles of real and created people or inanimate objects to develop individual style and imagination.

D. Given media stimuli, the student will write informal articles responding to sensory perceptions that are examined and developed into meaningful thoughts.

E. From assignments, class discussions, student suggestions, or free options, the student will formulate thoughts, emotions, reactions, into short articles.

F. Given various media stimuli, the student will compose humorous responses in the form of articles, drama, films, collages or essays.

G. The student will create humorous cartoons, comic strips, and essays from free choice or assigned topics.

II. COURSE CONTENT

A. Rationale

This course has been designed to meet six definite needs of student writers:

1. Expansion of awareness through books, films, filmstrips, field trips, and resource personnel

2. Selection of definite topics for writing

3. Identification of effective writing techniques

4. Recognition of various writing styles

5. Provision for a laboratory environment for the student writer

6. Provision for exhibiting or publishing student writings

B. Range of content

Students will write short and longer prose such as articles, biographical and autobiographical sketches, responses to stimuli, humorous essays and free choice prose which may develop from films, art exhibits, music, readings, and discussion. Emphasis will be on the development of content and form. Styles will be developed through practice with modeling and experimentation with varying styles.

C. Teaching strategies

All books and materials will be resources for both the students and the instructor. No textbooks are recommended as a means for lesson teaching or daily assignments. Textbooks and other resource materials should help provide answers to specific technical problems.

Group discussions involving students, teachers, and resource personnel should play an important role in the writing laboratory. Discussion should precede actual writing. This will afford students the opportunity to expand their thoughts before writing. Group sessions should provide an immediate outlet for student compositions. Students can read each other's articles, critique them, discuss their findings and other specific recommendations for improvement before finalized papers are submitted to the instructor for evaluation.

The instructor must be a working member of the laboratory who acts as a resource person and a catalyst. He provides the students with experiences in art, music, film, biographies, humorous essays, acts as a team member in group discussion, and critiques written work to aid in the development of the student's writing style. He should not be a lecturer nor a dominant figure but be available for consultation, stimulation, and encouragement. The instructor should evaluate compositions, make written comments about the work received for evaluation but not grade each item. A comprehensive progress report should be given the student periodically and a final grade should be determined in a conference by the student and his instructor.

Field trips and resource personnel should supplement the creative writing program, planned to correlate laboratory activities and outside experiences. Field trips may be taken for (1) atmosphere, (2) studying human and animal behavior, (3) observing actors, sculptors, musicians, etc. at work, (4) supplementing classroom study of a play or short story such as a visit to a race course morning exercise session to correlate the reading of Hemingway's "My Old Man" with reality. Resource personnel should also be utilized meaningfully. Writers and theatre entertainers would be invaluable for providing insight, humorous sketch ideas, etc.

Publication of student compositions can be in a literary magazine, during an evening's entertainment for members and guests, or a combination of the two. Student committees should determine the majority of choices for publication. An evening's entertainment might include collages, dramatic monologues, dramatized scenes, taped or live readings, student films, choral readings, and group discussions involving students and guests.

This course emphasizes student activities and student participation. Its strength depends upon an instructor who is vastly interested in, and optimistic about, student writers and their works. It stresses individual growth and individual differences while calling for group shared responsibility, aid, and enjoyment.

III. LEARNING ACTIVITIES

A. Activities for Objective A. Given collections of writers' sentence varieties, paragraph constructions, vivid imageries and descriptions, and unique styles, the student will model his writing from these patterns for practice to expand his structural and stylistic capabilities.

1. Gather a personal collection of vivid vocabulary words and begin to utilize them in writing and speaking activities.

2. After collecting varieties of well written models for patterning, write similar practice sentences. Include cumulative, deletion, embedding and expanded modification sentences in the collection.

Model cumulative sentence:

They huddled, gaudy, motionless and alert, wild as deer, deadly as rattlesnakes, quiet as doves.
(William Faulkner)

Model embedded sentences:

All the team was present at the awards assembly. The coach was pleased.

The fact that all the team was present at the awards assembly pleased the coach.

The boat is at Dinner Key Marina. It is for sale. It has a 12 foot sail and a 5 foot beam.

The sailing boat for sale at Dinner Key Marina has a 12 foot sail and a 5 foot beam.

3. With your teacher's help, identify trite or hackneyed expressions in order to avoid usage. Discuss imagery and qualities of good writing and list hackneyed expressions to be avoided.

4. Compare student writing styles in open group or class sessions to learn differences and similarities of writing, good and poor choices of vocabulary, and rewriting procedures and techniques.

B. Activities for Objective B. Given biographical articles, chapters, and books to read and evaluate for form, content, and style, the student will write biographical and autobiographical anecdotes, sketches, and longer prose compositions.

1. Read a chapter of a well written biography. Ask your teacher's help in determining your choice. Place the chapter selected into a modified outline form. Study the development of the story line, determining the progression of the plot, the character expansion, the appeal of the writing. Using the outline, write a shorter version of the chapter of the biography. Biography suggestions should include sports figures, humanitarians, theatre performers, explorers, presidents and liberators.

2. Using the above biography, develop one sequence of the book into a complete article.

3. Select a person who was previously not newsworthy from a daily newspaper such as an honored person, an accident victim, a burglary suspect, a hero. Write an account of the story from the viewpoint of the person involved.

4. Read a biography or view a filmstrip, television special, or a film about a famous person. Write the character into a modern situation, having the person react as he or she would have done. Use the biography background to provide the personality who would react in a particular fashion. Biographical suggestions might include Columbus exploring the moon, Jim Thorpe as a present-day Indian athlete, or Teddy Roosevelt leading troops in Vietnam.

5. Write a soliloquy in which a biographical character such as Benedict Arnold, George Washington. Charles Lindbergh, Martin Luther King, Madame Curie, Wild Bill Hickok, Beethoven, Van Gogh or Columbus explains famous actions. Use readings of soliloquies as a basis for writing. These writings may include Tom and Amanda's soliloquies from The Glass Menagerie, Katrin's soliloquy in I Remember Mama, Sammy's lines from The Dark at the Top of the Stairs, Linda's thoughts in Death of a Salesman, Helen Keller's dialogue in Story of My Life, or Shakespeare's famous soliloquies of Hamlet and Lady Macbeth.

6. Research the facts about the people of a country, an island, or a city. Write an article about one of its adults or young members describing his or her way of life. Bring the character to life by giving the figure an identity, a name, a particular life, a career, a family.

7. Interview by mail or in person an individual in a career that is of particular interest, questioning him or her about career factors. Write a biographical sketch emphasizing the career training and aspects that directly relate to the person's life.

8. Compare a recently written (1960-1970) biography, student researched, with one written before. Note stylistic changes and points of emphasis. Selecting a person, survey a portion of his or her life through magazines, newspapers, books, etc. and write, imitatively, in the older or more modernistic style a two-page partial biographical paper.

9. With other group members, write a dramatization of a chapter from a famous biography. Present the script as an oral interpretive reading or as a one-act play.

10. Research a current American sports or political figure via newspapers and magazines to formulate a man or woman's pattern of life and create a career biographical article.

11. Read a full length biography of a person of particular interest. Write an evaluation of one sequence, detailing why it is meritorious. Using the biography sequence as a model, invent a person and write a fictional episode similar to the one read.

12. Interview a classmate. Ask biographical questions that exclude the factual place of birth, date, family. Include questions that ask him to describe a most terrifying incident, a secret desire, a career position in ten years, a funny happening, etc. Write a sketch from one of the responses embellishing the facts with interesting language, style, and imagination.

C. Activities for Objective C. The student will write biographical articles for real and created people, animals, or inanimate objects to develop individual style and imagination.

1. Select an animal such as a lion, a kangaroo, an aardvark, an ostrich, an eagle and write its life story as lived in its natural habitat. Write the biography from an omniscient third person point of view.

2. Rewrite the animal biography from a first person, autobiographical point of view livening the story and utilizing imaginative insight.

3. Compose a collage of pictures and quotes of a famous person to present a slanted, specified image.

4. Survey twenty students using a class developed questionnaire to determine an "average" student. Include in the questionnaire hobbies, musical preferences, school activities, family members, vocational interests, educational desires. Compile the data, formulate generalities and, using this information, write a current fictitious biography of this "average student."

5. Keep a diary of autobiographical notes of events, personal feelings and moods, successes, failures. Use these for free essays for weekly group sharing or for private writing not meant to be shared.

6. Assume that you have become a composer, an actress, an artist, a dancer, a computer programmer, a doctor, a bridge builder, a sandhog, a mountain climber. Write an article relating one exciting experience in your life.

7. Take a difficult teen-age situation, become the person involved and write an autobiographical account of your "horrible" time.

8. Become a fairy tale character such as Red Riding Hood, Little Baby Bear, Cinderella, Peter Cottontail, etc. and write an autobiographical anecdote of your famous episode.

9. Write an informal description of yourself as you are now, as you were five years ago, and as you hope to be in five years from now.

10. Become an object that is displayed such as a painting, a piece of sculpture, a racing car, a stuffed buffalo. Write a reaction to the people who look at you.

11. Choose an inanimate object such as a pencil, an electric shaver, a lawn mower, a piece of tape, a left shoe, a pair of beads, and write a living biography about it. Bring it to life, create its existence, allow it to speak for itself, and predict its future.

D. Activities for Objective D. Given media stimuli, the student will write informal articles responding to sensory perceptions that are examined and developed into meaningful thoughts.

1. Experience a still photograph or a Come to Your Senses filmstrip picture and write a short piece about your perceptions and emotional reaction.

2. Visit a metal shop, a furniture manufacturer, a jewelry designer, a clothing manufacturer. Record impressions and details. Write an article as an employer, employee, and visitor, bringing a personal touch to the writing by avoiding a cold, journalistic style of writing.

3. Collect data on a news story. Compose a feature article from the information gathered, injecting comedy or pathos into the writing.

4. Visit a local tourist attraction such as the Miamarina, the Planetarium, the Serpentarium, Crandon Park, the Lincoln Road Mall, Fairchild Gardens, the Miami International Airport and write an article reflecting your point of view about your visit. Cite specific reasons and examples for your position. Embellish your writing with vivid descriptions and imagery.

5. Experience an abstract art selection. Note emotion, form, unity, balance, color, texture, and strength of the painting. Share your findings in small group discussions. Write an article emanating from this experience.

6. Listen to a song such as Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head, Moon River, Let It Be, I'm a Cockeyed Optimist, and jot down noted reactions and share in a group discussion. Compose a group piece of music, new words to a song, or a lyric to be read or spoken to a musical background rather than a melody.

7. View a full length television program. Critique it according to plot, characterization, acting, and believability. Write the criticism, modeling it after a newspaper or magazine review.

8. Select a cartoon character such as Dick Tracy, Snoopy, Brenda Starr or Pogo and write a sequenced episode for a ten-day segment. Use stick figures or cut-outs from the newspaper as the cartoons and write the captions.

9. Experience a short subject film and write a creative paper emanating from your viewing. The composition may be a description of the film, a story from its theme, a violent reaction to its quality, etc. but should result from class discussion following viewing of the film.

E. Activities for Objective E. From assignments, class discussions, student suggestions, or free options, the student will formulate thoughts, emotions, reactions into short articles.

1. Select a current controversial theme such as abortion reform, capital punishment or nuclear testing. Determine two opposing positions. Write a persuasive article defending each point of view. Share in group sessions to determine weaknesses and strengths of each position taken.

2. Develop a story line within a small group writing team by round-robin additions, each member contributing a sentence or paragraph from the preceding one by following a logical, believable sequencing.

3. Place yourself in jeopardy in a jail awaiting a possible death penalty, in a banana-eating contest at the onset of a stomachache and one banana ahead of the nearest competitor, on a deserted highway at night with car trouble, etc. Create a story ending that is highly suspenseful.

4. Compose an advertisement, writing the copy, designing the display, making the display on poster paper, on 8mm or Super 8mm film or as a bulletin board in the classroom.

5. Create a new holiday or a new commercial product and develop the campaign to introduce it. Include the copy, the radio and television spot commercials and the packaging for the product. Present it to the class on a sharing day.

6. Join in a teen-age "Dear Abby" or "Eleanor Hart" column session. Write a letter describing your problem. Select one from the class closed-box contributions and write an informal, lightly expressed answer that is believable.

F. Activities for Objective F. Given various media stimuli, the student will compose humorous responses in the form of articles, drama, films, collages, or essays.

1. Read "The Night the Bed Fell" or another James Thurber selection. Study the form and character sketches as they appear in the story. Select a family situation using one of his characters or develop one of your own and write a short humorous anecdote.

2. Collect Art Buchwald, Sidney Harris, etc. articles for study. Select one humorous article and write a similar paper that states your position about the topic but use a light touch for your mood.

3. Build a "Today's Chuckle" or "Love Is" collection from daily newspaper clippings. Begin your own creative collection with the same titles or initiate one of your own. Try for daily entries if possible, publishing them as your personal volume or as a class collection.

4. As a group member view a televison half-hour situation comedy program such as Eddie's Father, Bewitched, The Lucy Show, A Family Affair, or All in the Family. Using the same characters, write and present a teleplay that establishes the same type humor and the characters in similar roles.

5. Select a magic trick or unusual object. Write a humorous descriptive essay about the object, bringing it to life or placing it in a comic situation.

6. Discuss in small groups what constitutes humor based on cumulative experiences from classwork and assignments, listing and defining the elements and different types of humor. Compose a class list from the group lists and share in a class session that brings out examples of humor for future writing reference.

7. Study the styles of humorists such as Robert Benchley or James Thurber. Try to incorporate good elements of their writings into an open topic essay. Concentrate on imagery, word selection, and similar sentence varieties.

8. Observe a bowling team, tennis players, a football squad, a baseball team, a basketball squad, a musical group, dancers, restaurant diners, sports spectators, etc. Look for deliveries, running styles, facial expressions, mannerisms that are comical. Write a short article, omitting all names or specific identifications, that is humorous yet clings to the realities of people being unconsciously funny.

9. View several cartoon films and identify the humorous antics of the feature characters such as Bugs Bunny, Porky Pig, the Road Runner, etc. and the comic situations that build because of their personalities. Write your own sequence for one of these cartoons.

10. After listening to comic monologues such as Bob Newhart's "Noah's Ark," Bill Cosby's "Fat Albert," or Andy Griffith's "What It Was Was Football," etc. write a humorous monologue from a list that might include:

    What It Was Was Hockey
    I Stepped on His Feet Again
    Running for a Touchdown-the Wrong Way
    A Batting Average of Zero
    The Great Trike Race

G. Activities for Objective G. The student will create humorous cartoons, comic strips, and essays from free choice assignments or suggested topics.

1. Suggest five punch lines for humorous stories and submit them to a class list. After selecting one from the class collection, write the comic beginning and main portion of the story. Share in groups for enjoyment and criticism.

2. List objects, thoughts, sights, sounds, smells that evoke a chuckle or a smile from you. Determine if possible in small group discussion sessions the reasons for the humor experienced. Select one for a collage that includes pictures of its entirety, its parts, effects, etc. or write an essay involving the object but present either one humorously.

3. Select a personal comic episode and determine the type humor displayed. Outlire the episode, then write the anecdote and record it for a class sharing day.

4. Write a complaint or protest article -- but write it from a humorous or tongue-in-cheek attitude.

5. Originate a humorous cartoon or comic strip illustrated by cut-outs or stick figures. Write a full segment that can be compiled with others for a class comic book.

IV. STUDENT-TEACHER RESOURCES

All textbooks listed are for both student and teacher references and are not to be used as a textbook for daily instruction. Literature textbooks and biographies are not listed because availability will vary according to the particular school. Teachers are encouraged to utilize library books, county materials and supplementary books whenever possible to expand facilities.

A. State-adopted textbooks

Blickbahn, Katherine, Nelson, Richard L., consulting editors. Writing: Unit-Lessons in Composition Series. Grades 9-12. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1964-1967.

Conlin, David, Herman, George R., and Jerome Martin.
Our Language Today 7, 1966.
Our Language Today 8, 1966.
Modern Grammar and Composition. Atlanta: American Book Company, 1967.

Hook, J. N. Writing Creatively. Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1967.

Warriner, John E. Composition: Models and Exercises, 7012. Atlanta: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1965.

B. Reference Materials

"Twenty Steps to Better Composition."

"Stories You Can Finish."

"You Can Write."

"Imagination." Columbus, Ohio: American Education Publications.

Guth, Hans P. and Schuster, Edgar H. American English Today. Atlanta: Webster Division, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1970.

Janaro, Richard. Identity through Prose. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971.

Kitzhaber, Albert R., general editor. Language/ Rhetoric Series. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968.

Macrories, Ken. Telling Writing. New York: Hayden Book Company, 1970.

Macrories, Ken. Uptaught. New York: Hayden Book Company, Inc., 1970.

Macrories, Ken. Writing to Be Read. New York: Hayden Book Company, Inc., 1968.

Murray, Donald M. A Writer Teaches Writing. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1968.

Otto, Don. "Composition Guide." Exploring Life through Literature. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1968, pp. 705-721.

Pooley, Robert C. "Composition Guide." Counterpoint in Literature. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1967, pp. 569-585.

Postman, Neil. Discovering Your Language. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1967. Chapters 4-6.

Postman, Neil. Exploring Your Language. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1967.

C. Filmstrips

Aids for Teaching Visual Communication. Rochester, New York: Eastman Kodak Company, Consumers Market Division.

Fresh Perspectives in Composition. Jamaica, New York: Eye Gate House, 146-91 Archer Avenue.

Sohn, David. Come to Your Senses: A Program in Writing/ Awareness. New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1970.

D. Films available from Dade County Audio Visual Department

Barge Men on the Rhine	1-14043
Boone, Daniel in America's Story	1-10209
Changing World of Charles Dickens, The	1-31846
Egyptian Villagers	1-13974
Galileo: The Challenge of Reason	1-31844
Indian Villagers in Mexico	1-13936
Miners of Bolivia	1-13973
Why Man Creates	1-30758

E. Rental films

Encyclopedia Britannica Educational Corporation
141 Wieuca Road, N. E., Suite 202
Atlanta, Georgia 30305

Bartleby. The enigmatic, haunting story of a man who "preferred not to," imaginatively filmed with authentic locales, period sets, and unusually sensitive performances.

Magic Prison. Emily Dickinson -- partial biography and selected readings.

My Old Man. Hemingway story about young Joe and his jockey father. Conflict of reality and illusion.

McGraw-Hill Films
Princeton Road
Hightstown, New Jersey 08520

The Bell. (La Cloche) Comedy, all visual. A man waits for his girl by a bell which falls over him as he seeks refuge from a thunderstorm. He finds difficulty extracting himself from the bell, which seems to take on a personality all its own.

Contemporary Films
330 W. 42 Street
New York, New York

A Day with Timmy Page. A funny study of a twelve-year-old filmmaker. Included are sequences from Timmy's film.

Happy Anniversary. Fast moving French slapstick centering around parking and traffic problems.

Pssht!! A spoof of the American family's obsession with aerosol cans.

Pyramid Films
Box 1048
Santa Monica, California 90406

Homage to Rodin. Most important sculpture presented in this tribute to the man and his art.

Lovers Quarrel with the World. Academy Award winning documentary on Robert Frost, both his private and public life.

Imperial Film Company, Inc.
4404 S. Florida Avenue
Lakeland, Florida 33803

Junkdump. A day in the life of a man and a woman who live in a dump. Shows family's relation to its environment.

Creative Film Society
14558 Valeriod Street
Van Nuys, California 91405

Fat Feet. Bizarre comic documentary on urban life. Characters walk around on huge papier-mache feet during a robbery, a fire, and a hustle. Odd and inventive.

Charlie Chaplin Films
Brandon Films, Inc.
221 W. 57 Street
New York, New York 10019

The Immigrant. Slapstick and pathos of an immigrant and his love who meet benevolence and disaster in the USA.

A Night at the Show. One of the most famous Chaplin films about a music hall. Charlie plays dual roles in this one.

The Tramp. The first Chaplin classic -- Charlie rescues a girl from robbers, falls in love with her, and gives her up.

F. Field trips

1. Writing Laboratory at a college or university (writing climate, student writers)
2. Art or sculptoring studios (atmosphere)
3. Band concert, Marine Studium, Bayfront Bandshell (atmosphere)
4. Drama presentation (atmosphere, character study)
5. Miami Wax Museum (biographical figures)
6. Miamarina (atmosphere)
7. Miami Herald (writing atmosphere)
8. Hialeah Race Course (atmosphere)
9. Cape Florida (historical, biographical background)
10. Crandon Park Zoo (animal character study)
11. Spanish Monastery (atmosphere)
12. Miami International Airport (atmosphere, human behavior study)
13. Pirate's World (atmosphere, human behavior study, comic study)
14. Hotel lobby (atmosphere, human behavior)

G. Resource personnel

1. University and professional writers
2. Newspaper feature columnists
3. Sports personalities